

Postdocs launch initiatives for summer interns

By Eddy Ball

Postdoctoral fellows are involved in two new support efforts for the 2014 NIH Summer Internship Program (SIP) at NIEHS.

Four NIEHS trainees received Summer Research Mentor Awards from the NIH Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE), recognizing their passion for mentoring and training students, level of creativity for experimental design, and commitment to invest in a summer student's first NIH research laboratory experience. The winners were Intramural Research and Training Award (IRTA) Fellow [Mahita Kadmiel, Ph.D.](#); Visiting Fellow [Natacha Steinckwich-Besancon, Ph.D.](#); IRTA Fellow [Erica Ungewitter, Ph.D.](#); and Research Fellow [Gary ZeRuth, Ph.D.](#)

In line with NIH-wide efforts by Journal Club-OITE, two IRTA fellows in the NIEHS [Ion Channel Physiology Group](#), Joanne Damborsky, Ph.D., and Simone Otto, Ph.D., worked over the past year to revive and redesign the Summer Journal Club Program, which had been dormant since 2011. The club held the first of four weekly meetings June 25, for discussion and critical reading of journal articles focused on a new technology in neurobiology known as optogenetics, moderated by Otto and Damborsky.

Linked Video

[Watch the MIT video, 'Optogenetics: controlling the brain with light' \(04:50\)](#)

Intensive mentoring for success

The Summer Mentor Award winners will serve as official mentors for Summer Internship Program students at NIEHS participating in the OITE Community College Summer Enrichment Program. Following their selection by OITE this winter, winners attended orientation sessions via webinars and conference calls. The students all attended the NIEHS Scholars Connect boot camp training June 2-4 on laboratory basics (see related [story](#)).

According to OITE Director Sharon Milgram, Ph.D., NIEHS had more winners than any other NIH Institute or Center. NIEHS Deputy Scientific Director Bill Schrader, Ph.D., and Office of Fellows' Career Development Director Tammy Collins, Ph.D., encouraged fellows to apply for the awards, both for the value to students and as a career development experience for the trainees.

"We're assigned students with a great interest in research, but with little to no research experience," award winner Kadmiel said. "This kind of teaching in the lab is a vital part of becoming a faculty member. This is definitely a very important step for me in my career [development]."

A journal club with a twist

Damborsky described the new journal club June 12 during the SIP student welcoming event (see [story](#)). "The purpose of this journal club is twofold," she told the students. "The first is to go over the basic structure of primary research articles and learn how to critically read and evaluate [the studies], and the other goal is to introduce a new technique that may be unfamiliar to many of you, optogenetics..., which uses light to activate neurons."

Damborsky and Otto selected two primary research articles and one review article on optogenetics for the interns to read and discuss. Their primary goal at the end of the journal club experience is for participants to understand the organization, components, and reasoning employed in research articles, and to develop a working knowledge of the basic concepts of optogenetics.



Like her fellow mentors, 2014 Fellows Award for Research Excellence (FARE) winner Kadmiel has been recognized for her research, as well as her service. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Steinckwich-Besancon is a 2015 FARE winner. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Ungewitter won a 2014 and 2015 FARE. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



ZeRuth won a 2014 FARE. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Redesigning the SIP journal club called upon the creativity, knowledge of cutting-edge scientific technique, and management skills of organizers Damborsky, above, and Otto. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



In addition to her service to interns this summer, Otto is also a contributing writer for the NIEHS Environmental Factor newsletter. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

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